

E

453

.C75





REPORT BY THE COMMITTEE

OF THE

Contrabands' Relief Commission

OF CINCINNATI, OHIO.

PROPOSING A PLAN

FOR THE OCCUPATION AND GOVERNMENT OF VACATED
TERRITORY IN THE SECEDED STATES.



CINCINNATI:

GAZETTE STEAM PRINTING HOUSE, FOURTH AND VINE STREETS.

1863.

C75

63791
'05

CONTRABAND RELIEF COMMISSION.

CINCINNATI, October 20, 1863

Resolved, That George Graham and John W. Hartwell be appointed to report a plan for the sustenance of the Freedmen, made free by the President's Proclamation, and the occupation of vacated territory in the Seceded States.

CINCINNATI, October 27, 1863.

At a meeting of the Cincinnati Contraband Relief Commission, the Report of the Committee on the Sustenance of Freedmen, and the occupation of vacated territory in the Seceded States, was unanimously adopted, and 3000 copies ordered to be printed for distribution.

REPORT OF COMMITTEE.

The Committee appointed to suggest a plan for the present sustenance and future government of the Freedmen of the Southern States, declared free by the Proclamation of the President of the United States, beg leave to say, that your Committee feel the magnitude and importance of the problem presented to them, and acknowledge their inability to grasp the subject, or to render that justice to the cause which it demands, and which more competent minds may hereafter present to the nation, aided by developments now in daily progress, modifying and altering different views to suit peculiar circumstances.

There are a great many difficulties to be encountered in any scheme of Emancipation which is to change suddenly, the forced or slave labor of three millions of people, into hired labor and a state of freedom. These difficulties are increased during the existence of a civil war, raging in the States where the slaves are to be liberated, and where there is a feeling in the master of exasperation, which leads him to thwart the operation of a system which has been forced upon him, and which is so odious to his education, that some Rebel masters would prefer to sacrifice the lives of their slaves, rather than to allow their capture, or to see freedom conferred on them by the Union Army.

Nowhere else has pro-Slavery fanaticism been so strong; the belief in the moral soundness of the institution has been nowhere so implicit; nowhere, therefore, would the introduction of a free industry have to encounter, on the part of the mas-

ters, such violent prejudices. Under such tyranny, and under such circumstances, the desire of the emancipated negro to break with his former mode of life, could scarce fail to be extremely strong; and with such feelings between master and slave, the freedman would require efficient protection to preserve his freedom during the existence of the rebellion. This would necessarily require a suitable military force until the rebels are subdued; and after that, civil jurisdiction under the General Government, or under a provisional government, might be substituted for the military, as a preliminary step to the reconstruction of State Governments.

It will be unnecessary for this Committee to state in full the cause of this unholy Rebellion. It is well known to you that the war was commenced by the South for no other reason, on no other pretext, than because a Republican President was elected in the ordinary constitutional course. If we ask why this was made the cause of revolt, the true answer is found in the aims of the Slave Power—aims which were inconsistent with its remaining in the Union, while the Government was carried on upon the principle of restricting the extension of its domain. So long as it was itself the dominant party, so long as it could employ the powers of the Government in propagating its peculiar institution, and consolidating its strength—so long it was content to remain in the Union; but from the moment when, by the constitutional triumph of the Republicans, the Government passed into the hands of a party whose distinctive principle was to impose a limit on the further extension of Slavery, from that moment its continuance in the Union was incompatible with its essential objects; and from that moment the Slave Power resolved to break loose from Federal ties. The war had thus its origin in Slavery: nevertheless the proximate issue with which the North had to deal was not Slavery, but the right of Secession. For the Constitution not having prohibited Slavery within the particular States, so long as the South confined its proceedings within its own boundaries, the Government, which represented the Constitution, could not take

cognizance of its acts, and it was on the right of Secession claimed by the South, that the North was compelled to join issue. Thus when the first gun was fired at Fort Sumter, the Northern people, taken by surprise, its leaders unaccustomed to power, its arsenals in the hands of its enemies, with traitors in its public offices, divided into parties holding discordant views, and recommending different courses, unanimous only in one strong wish, a desire at all events to uphold the Union, seemed for a time prepared to make any concession which promised to secure this end. On the other hand no vacillation marked the South.

With the directness of men, who, fixed in their ends, have little scruple in the choice of their means, its leaders were urgent to precipitate the catastrophe. Their skillfully contrived treason had secured for them the principal forts, and almost the whole military stores of the Republic. The most experienced officers in the United States Army, were their trusted agents, and were rapidly passing over to their side. Elated by success, and confident in their resources, it seemed at the outset of the contest that they had all but accomplished their daring scheme; that little remained for them but to seize upon Washington, and dictate from the Capital the terms of separation. Such was the position of affairs when the contest opened. More than two years have now passed, and contingencies which then appeared imminent seem no longer within the range of possible events. The true source of disaffection, so long concealed, has been laid bare, and is no longer doubted. The impossibility of bringing free and slave societies into harmonious co-operation under the same political system, begins to be understood. The absolute necessities of breaking at all hazards the strength of Slave Power, as the first step towards re-establishing political society in North America, is rapidly becoming the accepted creed. Meanwhile the advance of the Northern armies in the field, has kept pace with that of the opinion in public assemblies, and by an almost unbroken series of fruitful victories, the military superiority of the North seems now to be definitively

established. In this aspect of affairs, with anti-Slavery opinions making rapid way in the North, and the Northern armies steadily advancing on the Southern States, the reconstruction of the Union with Slavery retained on its former footing, and still more the triumph of the Slave Power, may, it seems to your Committee, be fairly discharged from their consideration.

In the progress of our army in the Southern States, it was clearly demonstrated that the slave population of the seceded Rebel States were contributing the most important aid to the Rebel armies by erecting their fortifications as a system of defense, and in the field performing the fatigue duty of the army, thus relieving the Confederate soldier from labor, and enabling him at all times to swell the ranks at short notice. Another portion of their slaves were on the plantations engaged in agricultural pursuits, furnishing the food and means of sustaining the army in the field. Under such circumstances, it was clearly seen that the chief element of strength in the Confederate States was the slave population. President Lincoln, therefore, issued his Proclamation, giving freedom to all the slaves of the seceded Rebel States, and as our armies advanced upon slave territory, the slaves left by their masters upon their plantations were taken within our lines and declared forever free. Thus they assembled at various points. Five or six thousand at Natchez, twenty thousand at Vicksburg, six thousand at Memphis, four thousand at Corinth, and at several places in Arkansas and Louisiana, making the number, including women and children, about 50,000.

These contrabands of all ages, male and female, deserted by their masters, who fled to the rebel lines, were received within the lines of our army in a starving condition, destitute of the means of living, with the exception of such provision as could be afforded for temporary relief by the commissaries of the army. The Contraband Relief Association of this city, with other institutions organized for a similar purpose, have contributed the principal part of the clothing for the women and children, with cooking utensils and some agricultural im-

plements, which, during the winter and summer months, were indispensably necessary.

It will be remarked here that the able-bodied male portion of this class of contrabands, anxious to sustain their freedom, and to contribute their part in subduing the rebels, have enlisted in the Union armies, leaving their families within the Union lines. That they have done their duty nobly and bravely, let the battlefields of Port Hudson, Vicksburg, Morris Island, and the fields in Arkansas, answer for them.

It is to the families of these contrabands that this Commission wish to call the attention of the Government, believing it to be highly important that immediate relief should be provided before the inclemency of the winter season shall set in, and find them without the means to obtain shelter, food or clothing. To assist in this work, your Committee have been directed by the Board of Managers to suggest such plan as they deem best for the future welfare of the contrabands, and also the best mode of reconstructing and populating the seceded States embraced in the Proclamation of the President.

What is the fact with which we have to deal?

A few hundred thousand slaveholders break loose from the political system with which they were connected, and erect a Confederacy on the avowed basis of Slavery, making the revival of the slave trade the corner-stone—a trade which all Christian nations have united in abolishing, and condemned as piracy. We know that the slaveholders aim at political independence, not for that lawful purpose which makes political independence the first of national rights—the purpose of working out a people's proper destiny—but for a purpose which makes it the greatest of national crimes. Now, these being the ends for which the Southern Confederacy seeks to establish itself, is it not justifiable to occupy their territory by their own population, converted from slavery to freedom under the Proclamation of the President? Your Committee deem it as much a duty, as to suppress murder or piracy, and having put our hands to the plow, we cannot look back whilst those States in rebellion against

Union are in hostility to the best Government on earth, which stands now as the beacon light, directing the way of the nations of the earth to freedom and liberty. Therefore, we cannot retreat from the position which we have assumed, and the world must admit, that the overthrow of the Southern Confederacy would be a benefit to the lovers of freedom in every part of the globe.

It will be observed that the Proclamation of the President applies only to those States which are mentioned in it, as in a state of rebellion. The other States, termed the Border States, are not affected by it, only so far as compensation may be voluntarily received by the masters, in giving freedom to their slaves, or their enlistment in the Union army.

Several modes have been suggested for terminating this war, and the reconstruction of the Government in the seceded States. One is to assign to Slavery the unsettled districts of the South and West. Another to reconstruct the Union, restoring Slavery on its former footing in the Rebel States. Another is to reconstruct the Union, and return the slaves made free by the Proclamation to their former owners. The first two modes would be deprecated by every freeman, as it would be committing a moral and freedom-loving people to a complicity with the damning guilt of Slavery. The third proposition, to return freemen to their former masters, to be held again as slaves, would cap the climax of all the crimes and iniquity of human nature.

Another proposition is colonizing the slaves on foreign territory. This was a favorite measure in time of peace with your Committee, but the Rebel States having commenced hostilities, and precipitated civil war on the free States, it became necessary to take away the prop of the rebellion, and to free their slaves on the plantations, after the masters had rejected the invitation to become loyal to the Union.

The Government, therefore, has but one course to adopt: to subdue the Rebellion and deal humanely with the slaves, by providing for their future happiness and freedom, on the soil

where they have suffered their degradation from inhuman laws establishing Slavery.

Your Committee, therefore, discard these several propositions mentioned, and suggest the occupation of the seceded States by taking possession of the property of known rebels by military authority, or under an act of confiscation, and as fast as the army takes possession of the vacated property of such rebels, let it be transferred to the Union Government, and under a proper system rented or leased to loyal men, who would employ the freedmen to cultivate the lands under a system of monthly or daily pay for their labor. By this mode an emigration of free and loyal men would introduce industry and enterprise in every part of the conquered States.

The freedmen and their families would be provided for from the regular pay for their labor, and being in a climate suited to their health and habits, they would be employed in pursuits of agriculture familiar to them. Thus both the laborer and employer would soon derive mutual benefit from the change, and instead of the amount of product produced under a system of slavery, by the introduction of machinery and proper agricultural implements, the soil would yield double the crops heretofore gathered. The laborers having been lifted from the degraded state of bondage, would have new impulses to provide for their own comforts, and to secure for themselves by their own industry, permanent homes, and education for their offspring.

This plan of occupation of the seceded States, will require law and order infused into it by the Government of the United States, and many regulations for the protection of those who lease the land, as well as regulations for those who labor on them, will be required, under proper authority, for holding the scales of justice properly balanced between the parties; and, as the State laws of the rebellious States are abolished by their act of treason, new laws must be adopted to suit the circumstances. In relation to the laws of the Rebel States, the Committee here quote from the late letter of Robert Dale Owen, of October 18th, 1863, (one of the Commissioners appointed to

investigate the condition of the freedmen.) In relation to State law, he says, that "One inhabitant, or all the inhabitants of a State may, by crime, forfeit their political rights. If all the inhabitants of a State, by some general crime legally imputable to all, forfeit their political rights, there will be no one remaining legally empowered to act under the Constitution of the State, or of the United States.

This is the present condition of the inhabitants of the insurgent States. The Supreme Court (claimants of *Schooner Brilliant*, &c., against the United States, March Term, 1863,) has decided, that these inhabitants, without distinction as to individual loyalty or disloyalty, have, in law, the same rights only as foreign enemies invading the land. No one of them has a legal right to exercise the functions of Governor, or Judge, or State Representative. Nor have they a right to elect a Governor, or a member to the State Legislature."

If these views are correct, your Committee believe that it may become necessary for the Congress of the United States, at their next session, to establish a Bureau, to be styled the "Bureau of Emancipation," with officers recommended by the President, and authorized by Congress, located in Washington, whose duty it shall be to have the general charge of such business and regulations, which may become necessary in the government of the freedmen, under the President's proclamation, and also the occupation of the property and lands in possession, and which may come into possession of the general Government, by conquest, in the seceded States.

The Bureau at Washington to have branch offices, or agents, located in the several counties or parishes of each State. Such agents, commissioners or superintendents in the seceded States, should be required to pass an examination before a suitable board of examiners, appointed by the President, for the purpose of judging of the qualifications of the applicants, and their appointments made with the sanction of the President. Such agents and superintendents to have power to lease lands and other property, and to make report of their acts to the prin-

cial Bureau monthly ; also, to make reports to a Provisional Governor, or any other officer in the seceded States, who may be authorized by the United States Government to receive such reports.

The Secretary of the principal Bureau should be required to report annually to the Congress of the United States.

The officers of the branch offices in the several counties of the seceded States, ought to exercise discretionary power in dividing or sub-dividing lands or estates, and fixing the terms of lease, and providing from the proceeds of the property, an educational fund, to be appropriated yearly to the education of the families of freedmen. It might also be necessary during the existence of the rebellion, to designate certain points in each State as a place of rendezvous for freedmen and their families, who are left destitute on plantations deserted by their masters, thus, by removal, saving them from starvation until they could obtain labor and support.

Your Committee believe that the system recommended will be the best adapted to the population and occupation of the seceded States during the existence of a civil war ; best calculated to afford freedom and happiness to a class of men who have been governed by custom and laws, contrived with the single view of degrading the negro to the level of the brute, and blotting out from his mind the hope, and even idea of freedom.

In abolishing slavery a new order of things is introduced, in which the ascendancy of the men who now rule in the South would be at an end. An immigration of new men would set in rapidly from various quarters. The planters and their adherents would no longer be in the majority in their old dominions. New interests would take root and grow ; new social ideas would germinate ; new political combinations would be formed, and the party which has long swayed the politics of the Union would be gone forever.

In the agricultural condition of the country new systems would be introduced, and a diversity of agricultural products encouraged.

The rebel slave States in the South, have made cotton their principal crop, which has been exported to England for manufacture by English machinery, and all other considerations became secondary to this staple product. The manufacturing interest, and the diversity of agricultural pursuits, in raising a variety of crops, were unheeded in the South. The consequence was, that they became the slaves to the owners of the Manchester spindles, in furnishing them the raw material to be returned to them in fabrics at exorbitant prices, making England the great workshop of the Southern States. This system will be changed by the introduction of free labor. The mechanical skill and enterprise of freemen will soon introduce the loom and the spindle into the vicinity of the cotton field, and the cotton will be converted into cloth at home, without sending the raw material to the English spindles. Other machinery will soon follow. The wool on the spot will be converted into cloth, and exchanged with the clothier. The saw-mill will be at hand and exchanges will be made with the sawyer. The tanner will give leather for his hides, and the paper-maker will give paper for his rags.

Thus the expense and disadvantage, under which the system of slavery has labored, by sending the raw material out of the country, will be avoided.

“In a piece of cloth,” says Adam Smith, “weighing eighty pounds, there are not only more than eighty pounds of wool, but also several thousand weight of corn, the maintenance of the working people, and it is the wool and the corn that travel cheaply in the form of cloth.”

It is further important to observe that Slavery requires expansion of territory as the soil becomes exhausted. In free communities property becomes fixed in edifices, in machinery, and in improvements of the soil. In slave communities there is scarcely any property except slaves, and they are easily moveable.

The man who exhausts his land attaches little value to it,

and he abandons it; but he attaches much value to the slave whom he can carry away with him.

It is by the dignity of labor and freedom that a nation prospers. "These once established, the necessity of a military occupation, the rule of force, will cease; our political life will soon return to the beaten track of self-government, and the restored Union may safely trust itself to the good faith of a reformed people. The antagonistic element which continually struggles against the vital principles of our system of government, once removed, we shall be a truly united people, with common principles, common interests, common hopes, and a common future."

Your Committee do not deem it necessary to enter more fully into all the details necessary for the government of the people in the seceded States. They infer that so long as hostilities continue, military rule will be adopted, and such regulations as military authority may dictate, will conform to the state of the country and circumstances where the orders are issued. It is, however, highly important that some system be adopted for furnishing labor to the freedmen, and the authorities at Washington are earnestly solicited to provide the means for the support of the freedmen and their families, who are at the various locations in the Mississippi valley without the prospect of labor, and destitute of everything but the daily rations and clothing furnished the male population by the Quartermasters at the several military posts.

GEO. GRAHAM,
JON. W. HARTWELL,
Committee.

Cincinnati, Oct. 27, 1863.

Therefore, your Committee, in accordance with the views contained in the report, offer the following resolutions for adoption:

Resolved, That the military authorities at Washington be earnestly requested to authorize such measures as may be necessary to relieve the families of the freedmen, made free by the

President's proclamation, and now assembled at several camps or military posts on the Mississippi river and other places, thus to prevent great destitution and distress, which must otherwise occur during the coming winter.

Resolved, That we deem it to be the true policy of the general Government, to take possession of the vacated estates, and other property deserted by rebel owners, who are known to be traitors to the Union, and to authorize the occupation of such estates by loyal men under a leasehold system, making it a condition to employ as far as practicable contrabands or freedmen, and their families, made free under the President's proclamation, providing under a system of paid labor, for the support of such colored persons, during such periods of time as may be agreed on by the parties concerned.

Resolved, That a Bureau of Emancipation should be established, by authority of Congress, in Washington, for the purpose of taking charge of the business relating to the territory in the seceded States, which may be in possession of the general Government; and also, the future occupation of such territory by freedmen, made free by the proclamation of the President of the United States.

P D 17.0.



DOBBS EROS.
LIBRARY BINDING

MAY 69
ST. AUGUSTINE

FIA

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 012 027 505 7

